

Badger Vaccination, Castle Woods Nature Reserve, Carmarthenshire Year Three Report (2018)

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Introduction

The Wildlife Trusts across the UK have been working on the issue of bovine TB and the role of badgers in the disease cycle for many years, as different Governments have put forward proposals for culling badgers as a strategy for controlling the disease. We are very conscious of the hardship that bovine TB (bTB) causes in the farming community and the need to find the right mechanisms to control the disease. However, we believe that the evidence shows a badger cull is not the answer.

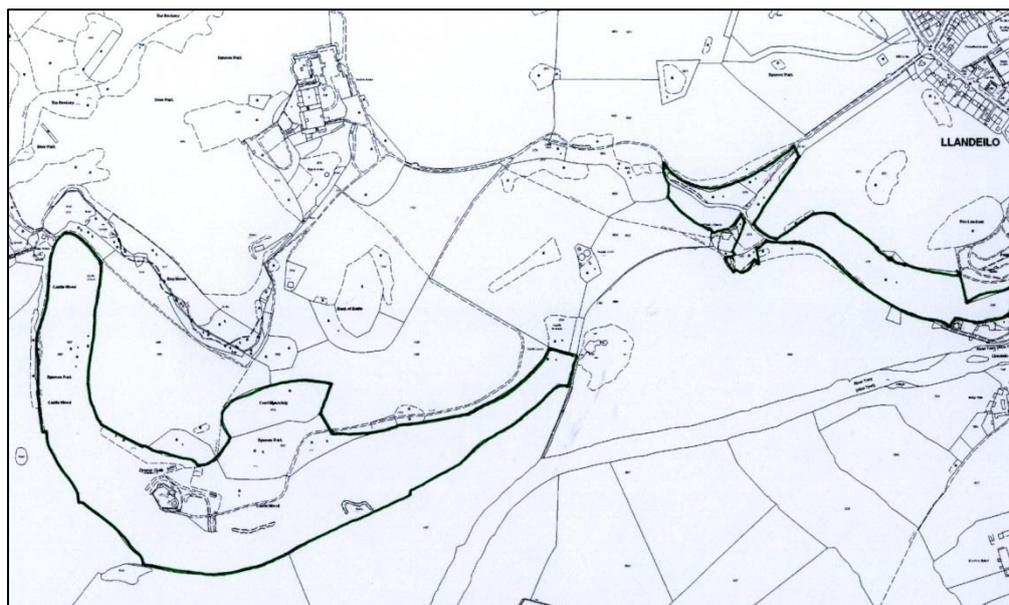
We recognise the seriousness of the situation for farmers but the emphasis of all our efforts should be to find a long-term solution. We therefore support badger vaccination, alongside a comprehensive package of cattle measures: better biosecurity, stricter movement controls, improved TB testing and development of a cattle vaccine. As such we strongly support the current Welsh Government programme for supporting badger vaccination and increased cattle controls.

For this reason, the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) decided to invest in a badger vaccination project at its Castle Woods nature reserve, Llandeilo. We felt it was important to be part of the solution, and to play a role in demonstrating that badger vaccination is financially and logistically viable on individual holdings.

The site: Castle Woods nature reserve

Castle Woods is an ancient, semi-natural woodland lying on the outskirts of Llandeilo in Carmarthenshire. It is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve, and it has been a WTSWW nature reserve since 1979. It is well known for its badger population and many local people watch badgers here. The adjacent parkland of Dinefwr, largely in National Trust (NT) ownership, also has a strong badger population. Both the park and tenanted farmland surrounding Castle Woods is grazed; some areas are sheep grazed but a large number of cattle are also kept on this land, both on the flood plain (by tenant farmers of the NT) and in the park itself, in the form of the NT's rare breed White Park Cattle. TB breakdowns have occurred in local herds.

The Castle Woods nature reserve itself comprises 25 ha of steep hillside broadleaf woodland, providing ideal habitat for setts, some of which are extensive and well established. The surrounding land (not in WTSWW ownership) provides excellent foraging for badgers.



Map 1: The extent of Castle Woods nature reserve in relation to Llandeilo town

The badger population of Dinefwr

A complete survey for badger signs across WTSWW property was undertaken during 2013-2014, prior to vaccination delivery in 2014 and 2015. This was followed by a two year break due to vaccine shortage and as a result, the setts were re-surveyed in spring 2018 by Carmarthenshire staff Rebecca Killa and Ceri Evans and their volunteer, prior to vaccination in 2018, to ensure the distribution dataset was fully up to date.

Funding

We have been fortunate to benefit from financial support to undertake the badger vaccination work at Castle Woods. Fifty percent of the project costs are being met by the Welsh Government badger vaccination grant. The rest has been provided by WTSWW core funds, a badger vaccination appeal by WTSWW to its members, and funding from The Green House in Llandeilo and the players of the People's Postcode Lottery.

Vaccination in 2018

We were fortunate to work in partnership with Andrew Crace-Calvert of EcoCon Ltd. to deliver our badger vaccination¹.

¹ EcoCon Limited, Leon Villas, Ash Rd, Lightpill, Stroud, Gloucs GL5 3PD / 01453 840395 / info@ecocon.co.uk

SSSI consent for the work was secured by WTSWW from Natural Resources Wales before work began. All other licences and permissions were secured by EcoCon with support from WTSWW and the National Trust in liaison with local landowners.



This year, the vaccination programme began on 01 August (later than previous years) with a site visit to check current sett activity, followed by a period of pre-baiting and four nights of trapping and vaccinating. Vaccination occurred in the Castle block on the mornings of 09 and 10 August and in the South Lodge / Church block on the mornings of 13 and 14 August.

Trapping was successful, with a total of 16 unique, novel animals caught (plus 6 retraps). The 16 novel animals were made up of 8 adults and 8 cubs. The total number of animals vaccinated was lower than in previous years but this reflected the reduced activity observed during the sett survey in spring, and reduced activity during the prebaiting period. It is probably a result of the very long, hard winter followed by the hot, dry summer having caused naturally high mortality.

Finances

The costs of this year's programme are laid out in the table below.

Cost item	2018
EcoCon Ltd.	
To survey, deploy cage traps, pre-bait, set to catch and vaccinate with badger bcg. badgers at the site known as Castle Woods Nature reserve, Dinefwr Estate. £6,380.51 (approved costings for 2018), less £675.31 for vaccines (Supplied by Welsh Government) equals £5,705.20 N.B. Of which only £5,255.00 incurs VAT	£5,705.20
Non-recoverable VAT	£1,051.00
<i>EcoCon Total</i>	£6,756.20
WTSWW	
Badger sett surveys – 5 volunteer days	£250 (in kind support)
Staff time (sett surveys, management, assistance with vaccination)	£1144.67
<i>WTSWW Total</i>	£1144.67

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our funders and volunteers who made this work possible. We would also like to thank the National Trust for their support and for allowing us use of their storage facilities.